

Sūrah 88

Al-Ghāshiyah

(The Overwhelming Event)

(Makkan Period)

Title

al-Ghāshiyah (literally, the overwhelming event), the *Sūrah's* opening word is how this chapter is titled.

Period of Revelation

al-Ghāshiyah is clearly one of the earliest Makkan *Sūrahs* in terms of its contents. It was revealed when the Prophet (peace be upon him) had publicly launched his call to Islam, even though the Makkans by and large ignored it.

Subject Matter and Themes

It is worth clarifying that in the early days of his mission the Prophet's message centred on the following two articles of faith: (1) Monotheism, and (2) the Hereafter. However, the Makkans refused to believe in these. This circumstantial setting may, therefore, help in better appreciating this *Sūrah's* contents.

AL-GHĀSHIYAH (The Overwhelming Event)

To awaken the Makkans lost in slumber, a disturbing question is posed before them: "Has the news of the overwhelming event reached you?" This is immediately followed by marshalling the harrowing details of the Day when men will be divided into two groups, each meeting a different end. One group will be driven to Hell and face its many punishments there. The other will enter the lofty Gardens of Paradise and enjoy its innumerable bounties.

After administering this shock to people, other questions are raised. Do these unbelievers not even reflect on objects of everyday life, as they refuse to accept the Qur'ānic teachings on monotheism and the Hereafter? For example, do they not observe camels, their lifeline in the desert? How these have been created with exactly those features that are best suited for their life in the desert? During their journeys they see the sky, mountains and the earth, so let them reflect on these objects only. How was the sky raised high? How were the mountains fixed? How was the earth spread out? Did all this happen without the creative power of the Supreme Lord, the Wise Designer? If they concede the role of the Creator, Who brought into being all this without any partner, why can they not accept Him as the One True God? If they recognize Allah as the Creator, they should not have any difficulty in grasping the concept of Resurrection. He is certainly able to bring back the dead to life. Again, He has the power to set up Paradise and Hell.

After presenting this succinct and clinching argument before the unbelievers, the address is directed at the Prophet (peace be upon him). The unbelievers' rejection should not worry him. For, he is not invested with the authority to compel them. His job consists only in rendering them good counsel, which he should carry out. All of them will ultimately return to Allah. He will then call them to account and punish the unbelievers terribly.